Maundy Thursday Homily

The hosannas had long since been silenced. It all seemed like a dream now, sitting in that upper room. They had followed for three years. They had listened and watched as he taught and healed. Miles and miles they had walked together talking about God and life and what it means to be alive and faithful.

They had walked with him all the way down from Galilee to Jerusalem, frightened, but exhilarated. And now everything was different. Opposition to him had crystallized, organized. He seemed to know it that night as they prepared to eat their evening meal. It was the night before the Passover but

there was something about his careful instructions that indicated that he knew they might not be able to observe Passover together, that this might, indeed, be their last supper.

He did something none of them would forget. He washed their feet. He knelt before each one of them — even when they protested.

After the meal he broke a loaf of bread and told them his body would be broken. He passed a cup and invited them each to drink from it. He said it was his blood shed. He said it was for them and he asked them to remember him every time they broke bread and drank wine together.

“This is my body broken for you” he said. Broken is a word that comes to mind about the world: brokenness in the Middle East and Africa, in Iraq and Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan. Brokenness in our own nation when violence and killing happen so frequently we barely notice.

Brokenness in the body politic, deeply divided, when every issue becomes the occasion, not for thoughtful debate and resolution, but ideological warfare.

“This is my body, broken for you,” he said — and somehow the brokenness of the human condition is gathered up in his brokenness.

And on the same night he said: "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." That is how we remember this day — Maundy Thursday: from *Maundatum* — Latin for commandment.

He commands us to love one another and the idea is that love, his love for the world, and our love for one another, is the answer to the world's brokenness . . . and that his love for us, and our love for one another, is the answer to the brokenness we experience in our own lives.

The world needs that love. The world needs men and women who are themselves being transformed by his love; men and women who give

themselves to imitating him as he knelt before his disciples in humble service; men and women who love by serving others and working for God's kingdom of peace and justice and hope — in the world — which means right where they are — in these families, these intimate relationships, these friendships, these neighborhoods, this church, this city.

Sometimes that love seems weak in comparison with the forces of hatred and violence and injustice. They surely felt that way too as the net of intrigue closed powerfully around him this night.

What makes this week holy — this day holy — this sacrament holy — is

the reality that his love is the most powerful force in the world; that he, humble servant, going to his death, is showing us, showing the world, the extent and power of God's love.

Now, as we eat and drink together, and tomorrow and the next day, let us remember him, and let us not forget his commandment to love one another as he has loved us.

(Words of Institution)

On the night he was betrayed . . .